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## ENGLISH IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: SOME CON- SIDERATIONS AS TO ITS AIMS AND ITS NEEDS

He who to-day claims a large place for English in a course of secondary studies finds himself wholly in harmony with the spirit of the time. It is not his business to prop a declining cause. In behalf of Latin, for example, we have heard it affirmed that the study of the ancient language contains the potency of leadership in human society, and that this study alone confers insight into the embryology of the race. But the English teacher need promise no marvels or use the figures of vaticination and vision. That English is essential everybody sees as well as the seer himself. That English study is inherently interesting on many sides, that it calls into play countless mental activities, that it is a powerful agency in shaping the taste and confirming the character,—all these facts are coming to be more clearly seen and expressed in programmes.

The latest programme of the University of Chicago shows a list of fifteen persons engaged in teaching English, and a series of sixty English courses. In this respect all the great universities are approximately like Chicago. By its range, its implications, its suggestiveness, its obvious utility, and its power, at the same time, to stimulate and satisfy the imagination, this plexus of studies which we name English surpasses all other subjects in college programmes. Its only rival is history, a loving and harmonious sister, with whom it walks hand in hand, each the happier for the other's presence.

But English, which is so multifarious and complicated in the upper education, is very far from being a simple and single thing in the secondary and the lower. It is a pleasing embarrassment to have too many possessions, but yet it is one. Our first problem as secondary teachers is the problem of choice. Shall our choice be the history and development of the language, and shall it include Old English, or shall our study begin where modern people can read; shall it be grammar, analysis, parsing; shall it be phonetics, vocabulary, forms, inflections, roots; shall it be

rhetoric, composition, style, diction, figures ; shall it be historical literature, or chiefly æsthetic criticism, exposition, interpretation, appreciation ; shall it embrace separate studies of the several phases of literature, as epic, lyric, dramatic, romance, novel, chronicle, homily, essay, epistle ; shall it specialize poetics, and shall poetics include metric, rhythmic, and the study of poetic motives,—and shall we practise paraphrasing ; shall we give attention to elocution, to oral expression, to declamation, to histrionics ? Every one of these elements of English instruction has its legitimate place in the secondary school. Obviously, however, they cannot all be admitted on equal terms. It becomes necessary to select, to prefer some things to others, to make, at least for the time, some kind of course of English study that shall be consistent and progressive.

And here consider how unhappy is the lot of those schools on which the necessity of this choice does not devolve. Only feeble characters crave perpetual guidance and shrink from the responsibility of choosing. A college catalogue tells what to do, not that we may present a symmetrical and interesting course of English, but that we may prepare for an examination.

This function of preparing for college has shrunk and scanted the professional thought of our secondary teachers and reduced them to low places in the ranks of educational leaders, notwithstanding their abundant Latin, because it has put them in leading-strings and too closely marked out for them the boundaries of their work. No man or woman of great originality has come from among American college-preparatory teachers. To see his work as a whole, in its relations to the rest of the field of education, the teacher must have it all to do,—the first philosophizing, the correlating, the adjusting, as well as the conduct of the daily recitations and the marking of periodic examinations. Primary teachers have long been philosophizing ; all our inspiration comes to-day from them. Would it not almost seem that there is in the teaching of elementary Latin and Greek some malign influence that tends to degrade men to the posture of acquiescence in the exactions of authority ? For originality and self-activity force men to explore the rational grounds of all they do in the habitual exercise of their vocation ; and men who find in themselves no promptings to seek the rational grounds of their actions, but ever

proceed to these actions under constraint or from mere use and wont, are not original and self-determined men. This is the danger to which secondary teachers are preëminently exposed, accepting, as they do, the dictation of authority as to their course of study and the proportions of its parts. To-day, indeed, the secondary men are very busily discussing courses and methods. But I have only to ask whether this revival of interest has been produced by an upspringing from within of a spontaneous zeal for philosophical inquiry, or whether it has been caused by a prodding from without; whether secondary men yet feel competent to discuss their own problems alone, and whether they seem even to know what these problems are till they have been told. Secondary activity to-day is chiefly concerned with improvements in the examination machinery, and with the establishment of closer relations with the colleges. To its own prime necessity it appears to be indifferent.

This prime necessity of the secondary education, I venture to suggest, is the establishment of a philosophy of adolescence, just as the great necessity of primary education is establishment of a philosophy of childhood. But while the infant is getting his rights, the youth is still waiting. At present, of course, a rounded, accepted, final philosophy of any area or period of the human mind is not even thinkable. But a philosophizing activity prevails in an increasing number of minds, and it must be remembered that it is not at all needful to step at once into a finished philosophical system in order to have the fruits of a philosophical activity. To be philosophizing is enough. Our philosophy is not to dawn upon us or be achieved by meditation with the eyes shut, but is to begin with collected data, like all sciences; and the collection of data, which implies trained observation, can be at any time begun; and this will be the beginning of philosophizing. To philosophize is a very different thing from studying college requirements or the reports of committees. The thing that is best is that which approves itself to thought and instructed insight as best fitting the given case, and by no means always the thing that is the most numerous and the most impressively signed.

No superintendent or supervisor knows how to supervise the secondary education. No normal school knows how to train secondary teachers. This portion of our system is still governed by

tradition, or by tradition modified by external demands. The conventional secondary teacher is typified in the college-preparatory "coach", who undertakes to get a boy through the examinations in so many years. The philosophical teacher considers the age, taste, and capacity of the youth, the civil society in which he is to live, the possibilities of service to humanity which his life in this society is to offer.

A discussion of secondary English must begin therefore with the actual elements of the problem,—that is, with the questions that grow out of the nature of the case, rather than with any theses momentarily engaging attention. We have to consider, first, what is, or should be, the ideal aim and purpose of a course in English offered to youth. Then we have to inquire what phases or parts of the complex whole that English is are best fitted to interest and stimulate the adolescent mind. Questions of method also are to a certain extent in place in a general discussion; but the solution of these will depend mainly on the tastes, the training, the aptitudes,—that is, on the personality, of the individual teacher; and the personality of the teacher should have large scope. A supervision that is more vigorous than wise exacts conformity to a set standard, and so succeeds in stifling zeal: a supervision that is more wise than vigorous shrinks from bringing minds into friendly collision, and so leaves zeal unawakened.

What then should be the aim and purpose of a course of secondary English? I will venture the generalization, and will say that the aim of secondary English is to bring the individual mind into closest possible touch and sympathy with the national mind. Primary English is concerned mainly with the language, the means or instrument of acquisition. Secondary English is concerned mainly with using the instrument and actually acquiring the possessions. I know the danger of gnomic utterances, and so hasten to say that of course the primary pupil uses language to gain knowledge, and that the high school pupil and the college student keep up their language study. But note that the child so deals with the language as to gain the power to understand it and use it correctly, while the youth examines it historically and scientifically, that is, studies linguistic science, a subject which, until advancing maturity calls into life in the youth the ardor of re-

search, is of distinctly inferior value. Hence I maintain that in the secondary, or adolescent, stage of culture, the chief concern of the school is to open to its pupils the great literary treasures that await them as inheritors of English speech.

In using the expression, national mind, I have in view, of course, the great mass of men whose native tongue is English. Living in widely sundered states and provinces, all these men are straitly bound together by a spiritual tie that makes of small account the diversity of political institutions. Attend a school exhibition in Calcutta, in Melbourne, in Montreal, in San Francisco, in London, and you will hear the boys and girls recite the familiar old verses, and declaim the same stirring passages that we know so well. A good half of our very patriotism is loyalty to ancient English ideas, and goes back to Magna Charta, to Naseby, to the expulsion of the Stuarts. Shakespeare is edited, printed, read, acted as much in America as in England. Every English writer contemplates an American public, and every American writer contemplates an English public. When we came to this country we brought our ancestral literature with us, and have ever since been living in it, imbibing its spirit, casting our thought in its moulds. The ecclesiastic who dwells serenely in an English cathedral close and has charge of literary arcana that we go thousands of miles merely to see,—as medieval pilgrims went to the shrines of saints,—reads the same Bible, the same Shakespeare, the same Bunyan as the western frontiersman who lives on a windy prairie, and whose books, though few, are the spiritual light of a lonely household.

The whole range of instruction in English is distinctly three-fold,—language, composition, literature. In secondary teaching these should not be separated, either by assigning them to different teachers or by taking them up singly at different periods of the course. The course of English should be concentric, and all its other elements should centre about literature. Language should be ancillary to literature and taught simultaneously with it, and composition should accompany every subject in which English expression is practised as an auxiliary of the instruction. This means, of course, that composition is to be attended to in every subject taught in the school.

It is obvious that the English in which a pupil writes a physics or a chemistry note-book, records an analysis in botany or zoölogy, gives orally or in writing a translation from a foreign language, makes a history report, takes notes of a lecture, writes a request for a book from the library or for exemption from some task or in the way of exculpation from some delinquency, in short, uses audible or visible speech for any purpose whatever,—it is obvious, I say, that this English counts for as much in the formation of habit as the special writing for the English teacher which we call formal composition. The way in which a person writes when off his guard,—that is, when his writing is subordinated to some other purpose than the desire to appear fine, is the way in which it may properly be said that he writes. All through life people have to write, never to show off their writing, but always to serve some useful end in the affairs of business or in compliance with social usage. Hence the important thing to know about a youth is by no means what sort of compositions he has written, but of what sort is his habit of writing. Sometimes it happens that we do not know quite so well as we should like to what is the import of a well written composition. Then we look up other evidences. If the composition was written under the stimulus of a mark, it is poor evidence of the state of the writing habit. In this case it is well to see what kind of English the writer is wont to compose in examinations that were to be marked not at all for their English, but for their revelations of knowledge of some other subject. Or better yet, it is well to see specimens of his writing not intended for the teacher's eye at all. The English of life, remember, is not to be marked. Pupils are destined to write one day according to their habits pure and simple, when there will be no time to recall the precepts of the class room, but when expression must be instantaneous and right, like the movements of well-drilled soldiers.

We forget that writing is a matter of habit and are forever treating it as if it were a matter of knowledge. The difference is enormous. To write a bit of Latin or French, you summon your wits, and perhaps give up saying the thing you would in order to say the thing you can. Such writing is an affair of knowledge: you have no Latin or French habit at all. But if you are compelled suddenly to convey some important intelligence in written

English, you set down the content of your mind directly: your thought goes into speech through prepared channels: you write without consciousness of groping for word or phrase, and you afterwards know what you have said, but do not know what language you have used in saying it. This is writing from acquired habit, and is the way in which every cultivated person uses his mother tongue. An education which magnifies rules of expression and shuns perpetual oversight of the acts of expression results in forming the consciousness of defect. We all know people who are afraid to write a letter and are always apologizing for their speech. Can a course of English training have a more calamitous result? An abiding sense of unsurmountable defect is a blight upon the life, often referable in some measure, I doubt not, to excessive censoriousness and deficient guidance in our educational methods.

If we recollect that learning the art of good English expression is the forming of a habit, we shall be able to judge the relative value of some of our school processes. A habit implies previous frequent repetition of an act; and a good habit implies previous frequent repetition of an act carefully, wisely, tastefully performed. Reasoning about wisdom and taste has but little relation to the doing of wise and becoming things. That he may be led to change his mind, the adult must be convinced; but the child who does ill has simply to be shown the better way and, under applications of the pedagogic art, to be made to feel that the better way is greatly worth his while. The more securely it is formed, the further back does a habit retire into the region of unconsciousness, where it sits aloof, little liable to change and decay. But the process is slow, and, in the case of the habit of spoken speech, starts so early that we cannot possibly preside over its beginnings. A child's writing, however, begins during its school life, and this particular part of English accomplishment seems therefore to lie almost wholly within our jurisdiction.

A youth cannot come to the high school without some habits or other of English writing formed in the earlier schools. The importance of the first years is now fully understood, and primary education, by its daily and unremitting language lessons, acknowledges its function of training habits. The primary education is alive. Its leaders have worked out their own aims and methods,



or, rather, are ever working out new aims and methods, for nothing is fixed and ended yet. In the high school, still, nothing less will do than daily and unremitting language lessons. Every pupil writes English, more or less, each day. Hence the high school must learn how to supervise, not sporadic compositions, but a steady stream of composition. Whatever the pupil writes in English he must understand is liable to inspection. The production of a great bulk of hurried English known not to be liable to inspection is fatal to the growth of good habits of expression. But I submit to any body of secondary teachers the assertion that this describes correctly the conditions in which they are teaching composition. Such inspection will require, of course, the coöperation of all the teachers. All pupils use English to all teachers: all teachers must therefore have an eye on the English of all pupils. If a pupil in an English class propounds wrong history, wrong chemistry, wrong Latin, shall the English teacher let it pass as being not within his province?

That which has led astray our conceptions of method in the secondary teaching of composition is the tradition of high school rhetoric. We never chose to put rhetoric in the course of study, but found it there, and accepted it without question, as we accept the customs of society. As rhetoric was at hand, and as teachers felt more and more the pressure of new demands for training in composition, the course of action easiest to take,—the course that avoided the necessity of thinking, naturally was to refer to rhetoric and the teacher of rhetoric the responsibility for bringing up the English to the standard of the modern ideals. But what the world wanted of the schools was not rhetoric, but skill in the use of English; and as rhetoric could obviously no more in the future than it had in the past confer that skill, the bookish theoretic sank in general esteem, and the practice of writing under correction rose in favor. We are in the midst of this most wholesome movement,—theory falling, practice rising. In Massachusetts somewhat more than half the schools have dropped rhetoric altogether,—that is, the formal rhetoric that professes the name. They have all dropped psychology, which, a generation ago, flourished in the programmes side by side with rhetoric. When a study grows useless, the crowding utilities push it out, as the workers thrust the drones from the hive. There was nobody to promise

the devotees of psychology leadership in the affairs of men and insight into human embryology. Rhetoric is not quite so friendless, but it is going.

But vanishing rhetoric bequeaths to us the anomaly of teachers specially devoted to the correction of English in schools where all teachers equally hear or read this English. Every cultivated person,—let us say every person chosen to exercise the teaching function, knows when juvenile English is slovenly or wrong, and can correct the fault. In this respect every teacher is as competent as the one who teaches English. The correction of written work is to most teachers an extremely disagreeable task, so disagreeable that they are often even willing to aver their own incompetency for it on the ground that recognition of bad English requires special skill. Such averments are purely personal expressions, having no basis in reason.

I emphatically object to the setting up of an English standard which is above the speech of the mass of educated men. A dainty English, conforming to the rules of all the theorists, is too good to live in schools where work is to be done and thought is to be stimulated. A teacher specially devoted to rules is a teacher so far forth crippled for effective service in English teaching. For devotion to the rules tends to check naturalness, and makes the devotee appear a prig. I would have all teachers take in hand the correction of the school English, as a matter of course, just as they would reprove disorder on any part of the school premises. Faulty English shown to any teacher should be rejected or censured by that teacher; it belongs to his bailiwick, and to no other person's; and unless each teacher does this regularly and with alacrity, the English teaching of the school as a whole is weak, how strenuously soever the English teacher may labor. When a pupil writes, his thoughts should naturally concentrate themselves upon his theme, not upon his manner of expression. By too much nagging about details of language the linguistic consciousness is kept sore and raw. You know certain stammerers stammer only when they are particularly anxious not to. Villari tells of English schools where he found composition not taught at all, the pupils having it already as a part of their breeding. Villari's observation referred to youth from the English upper classes of society. But in the grades of an American

system, if composition were always attended to from the beginning, it would rarely have to be taken in hand as a special topic, and never in the way of grinding efforts to eradicate bad habits.

Formal rhetoric I would abolish entirely from the course; or at most give it a lesson or two at the very end as a sort of *résumé* of the foregoing discipline. Applied rhetoric, remember, will have been pursued during all the learner's school years. What the secondary school wants is the effects of rhetoric, not the science of it. Rhetorical science belongs in a more advanced stage of education. Thus it is with expression in speech as it is with conduct. No one thinks of referring the integrity of an upright man to previous study of the science of ethics; and no more does the common sense of mankind refer the good English of good writers to the study of rhetoric.

A certain amount of formal grammar, on the other hand, I consider extremely important. The distinction of subject and predicate, which is fundamental to thought and to speech, is comprehensible even to children younger than high school youth. The names themselves, like many other grammatical terms, are not merely technical, but belong to the vocabulary of educated persons. Intelligible and interesting to youth are the distinction of subject and object, the distinction of principal and subordinate elements, the meaning of noun, verb, and the parts of speech generally, of proposition, number, gender, and finally of case, tense, mode, relation, and government. To know whether a certain error is a barbarism, a solecism, or an impropriety is worthless knowledge. But tracing grammatical relations is a most excellent discipline, and the knowledge in which it issues is a most useful knowledge. Through parsing and analysis we gain facility in following the language, sometimes involved and difficult, of writers like Milton. No one can go far in Shakespeare without noting the peculiarities of his grammar. And you cannot conceive a beginning of study of a foreign language without perpetual consideration of grammatical topics. Therefore I recommend parsing and analysis, to occupy a certain quantum of our precious English time. It will not hurt a pupil's appreciation of Milton to parse a little of *Paradise Lost*. The opinion we often hear expressed that to parse beautiful prose or verse blunts the æsthetic enjoyment of it as literature I simply laugh at. The

onslaught on grammar which culminated some years ago was a senseless panic. Of late I believe the educational world is recovering its wits.

Our study of grammar will have to be historical, to match our study of literature,—that is; it will have to take in Tudor English, at least, and, I should hope, the later middle English of Chaucer. I cannot see the way clear, in view of our inadequate opportunity, to undertake more than a cursory study of the early history of the language. But it is certainly feasible to implant in the minds of youth right views of the place of English in the great world stock of languages; to make them see that English is essentially Teutonic, but has been an immense borrower; to show them how the strata of the English word hoard correspond with the periods of racial vicissitude; to enable them, in short, to use the dictionary intelligently in looking up the origins of words and the development of meanings. In the secondary school as it is to-day, the study of Old English (Anglo Saxon) is out of the question. The study would fail I think to interest the mass of youthful minds, and would too seriously trench on established subjects. The studies preparatory to Anglo Saxon, namely, Latin and German, should be, and are, pursued with vigor in the secondary schools. For the old literature, remember, we here also have the refuge of translations. Our pupils may not read their Widsith, their Beowulf, their Judith, in the original, but nevertheless, of course, they will read them. As the secondary schools develop, and the tyranny of courses yields to election, perhaps Anglo Saxon will find its place.

*(To be concluded in the November number.)*

*Boston*

*Samuel Thurber*